

## COVID-19: 2021 Graduation and Commencement Ceremony Guidance

### | Background

Central District Health (CDH) recognizes the great significance of tradition and celebration when it comes to graduation and commencement ceremonies. However, as we continue to seek ways to balance life amidst an ongoing pandemic and increasing detection of virus variants, health and safety should continue to be at the forefront. Though the number of people choosing to get vaccinated for COVID-19 does reduce our chances of exposure and illness, CDH recommends schools and its communities to be aware that many traditional activities, in-person gatherings with people outside of your household, and travel to areas outside of your home county can greatly increase your risk for exposure to COVID-19.

This guidance is intended for schools who are planning to host a graduation or commencement ceremony.

### | State & Local Public Health Guidance

CDH's [Public Health Advisory](#) remains in place and should be followed when hosting or attending an event. The advisory is a set of recommendations for Ada, Boise, Elmore, and Valley Counties to help protect the health and safety of residents. The advisory recommends that large gatherings be avoided, particularly those where physical distancing cannot be maintained between people who live in different households.

The State of Idaho is currently under [Stay Healthy Guidelines](#) which recommend that [gatherings be limited to 50 or fewer people](#), and also makes recommendations for the wearing of face coverings and physical distancing.

### | Gathering Attestation Forms Required for Gatherings/Events of More Than 50

**Events in Boise:** If your graduation ceremony of more than 50 people will be held in the City of Boise, [per the City of Boise's Public Health Order](#), you must submit a [COVID-19 safety plan \(form\)](#) to Central District Health for review and recommendation for approval by the City of Boise.

**Events (outside of Boise) in Ada, Boise, Elmore & Valley Counties:** Large events such as graduations and commencement ceremonies that will be held in Ada, Boise, Elmore, or Valley County with more than 50 people in attendance should submit an attestation form to CDH at least two weeks in advance of the event. (See above for any events to be held in Boise). The form must indicate that the school and/or event planner will follow the physical distancing, hygiene and gathering protocols to mitigate the risk of spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Use Idaho's Protocols for Safe Gatherings and Events in consideration and planning of your event.

- More information and the forms for submission to CDH can be found at:  
<https://www.cdh.idaho.gov/covid-forms.php>

*If you do not feel well, have a respiratory or gastrointestinal illness, or may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, you should not host or attend in-person gatherings.*

### Gatherings & Risk Factors to Consider

Several factors can contribute to the likelihood of attendees being exposed to or spreading COVID-19 at graduation ceremonies. Please consider:

- **Number of COVID-19 cases in your community.** High or increasing levels of COVID-19 cases in the event location or the locations the attendees are coming from increase the risk of infection and spread among attendees.
- **Setting of the event.** Indoor events, especially in places with poor ventilation, pose more risk than outdoor events. Virtual or drive-through ceremonies remain the safest way to celebrate.
- **Length of the event.** Events that last longer pose more risk than shorter events.
- **Number and crowding of people at the event.** Events with more people increase the likelihood of being exposed and physical distancing being compromised.
- **Behavior of attendees during an event.** Events where people engage in behaviors such as interacting with others from outside their own household, singing, shouting, hugging, not maintaining physical distancing, or not wearing masks consistently and correctly, can increase risk.

### Gathering Size

- Keep the group as small as possible. Consider offering a virtual attendance option for all or part of your event to allow more people to be a part of the experience, but not in-person.
- When deciding how many people to admit into the ceremony, consider the amount of space you have and the ability to maintain social distancing during the event. Consider allowing each graduating participant a designated number of guests or spectators.

### Health & Safety

- Practice social distancing and ensure everyone in attendance properly and consistently wears a mask over their nose and mouth.
- Remind attendees to regularly wash their hands or use hand sanitizer; place in easy to access places at your venue with visible signage.
- Discourage greeting others with physical contact (e.g. handshakes).
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces frequently and any shared items between use; develop a schedule for increased, routine cleaning.
- If having an indoor gathering, improve ventilation by opening doors and windows as much as possible; keep in mind that while outdoor activities are safer than indoor activities, the virus can still spread outdoors.
- Anyone invited or associated with the gathering or event that does not feel well, has recently been around someone with COVID-19, or is awaiting a test result, should not attend or help with the gathering.
  - Clearly communicate expectations prior to the event. Ensure that all staff, participants and attendees understand this expectation.

- Evaluate the timing of a graduation ceremony. Consider how an exposure and subsequent quarantines would affect upcoming educational activities.
- Maintain documentation of those in attendance and consider seating charts for participants and attendees.
- Use reminder signs about frequent hand hygiene and physical distancing; consider regular announcements to attendees as reminders.

### **Considerations for Staff and Attendees**

- Get your COVID-19 vaccine; anyone 16 years and older in Idaho is now eligible for the free and effective vaccine
- Consistently follow any local public health orders or advisories in place
- Consider attending an event or gathering virtually if it's an option
- Wear a face covering
- Keep at least six feet between you and others
- Watch for symptoms and stay home if you are sick
- Wash your hands often
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Disinfect surfaces and objects regularly
- Continue to implement safety and mitigation measures outside of the larger event (e.g. graduation parties)
- Take time to care for your mental health – seek free resources and reach out to others

### **Resources for Use + More Information:**

- Central District Health Public Health Advisory: <https://www.cdh.idaho.gov/covid-advisory.php>
- Gatherings of More than 50 Attestation Form & Boise City Events Form: <https://www.cdh.idaho.gov/covid-forms.php>
- Idaho Coronavirus Website: <https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/>
- City of Boise Public Health Order: <https://www.cityofboise.org/departments/mayor/coronavirus-covid-19-information/public-health-emergency-order-no-20-15/>
- CDC – Guidance for Organizing Large Events and Gatherings: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>
- Mental Health Resources in Idaho: <https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/behavioral-health/>
- Mental Health Support – find help and ideas in English & Spanish: <https://howrightnow.org/>